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With All Due Respect to Plato: The *Platonic Orations* of Aelius Aristides\*

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<sc>summary<sc>: This article offers a fresh analysis of the tone and argumentative strategies of *Orations* 2–4 of Aelius Aristides. It suggests that they are a more hostile and destructive exercise than is normally allowed for and that the recent critical consensus that they represent essentially an effort to reconcile philosophy and oratory needs substantial revision; these *Orations* testify instead to the continuing awkwardness of Plato and philosophy as components of the Greek cultural heritage in the Imperial period, as well as to the ambition of Aristides' own strategies of self-presentation.

<sc>keywords<sc>: Aelius Aristides, *Platonic Orations*, Plato, rhetoric, philosophy, imperial literature

<sc>Plato in his dialogue the *Gorgias*, composed sometime in the mid-380s <sc>b.c.e.<sc>,<sup>1</sup> launched a notoriously stinging attack on the intellectual and political claims of oratory and its codification as a body of knowledge and techniques. The Socrates of this dialogue insists that oratory and its study is not a true science, art or skill (not a true *technê*), but rather an unsystematic, empirical bag of tricks, unsupported by any deeper reflective understanding; it is aimed not at establishing and conveying truth and knowledge, but instead at appealing to the lower, appetitive urges of its audience, in pursuit of the speaker's interests rather than theirs. On these grounds, it can be categorized as a form not of art or craft (*technê*), but of

mere flattery—*kolakeia*. Oratory in the abstract is *kolakeia*, and any actual orator—up to and including the greatest orator-statesmen in Athenian history, of the stamp of Themistocles, Pericles, Miltiades and Cimon—just a *kolax*. Importantly, however, the dialogue has a constructive as well as a destructive side. To his portrayal of oratory as the perversion of good communication (proper use of *logos*), good values and the right treatment of others, Plato opposes the healing ideal of benevolent, candid, truth-seeking philosophical conversation (dialectic), embodied of course in the person and example of Socrates. The *Gorgias* thus becomes as much a recommendation of an ideal of philosophy as a demolition of the claims of rhetoric.

Something over five hundred years later,<sup>2</sup> Aelius Aristides took issue with this dismissal on behalf of oratory in his three *Platonic Orations*: two enormous treatises, of 466 and 694 chapters (*Orr.* 2 and 3), and a shorter epistle of a mere fifty-one (*Or.* 4). The main argumentative weight is borne by *Or.* 2, *A Reply to Plato, in defense of oratory*. In this, Aristides' primary aim is to contest the dismissal of oratory as itself as unscientific and therefore worthless as an element in human civilization, and to propose an alternative, much warmer assessment of its worth; but he responds also incidentally to the criticism of the great Athenian orator-statesmen. *Or.* 3, *A Reply to Plato in defense of the Four*, focuses instead on the criticism of the orator-statesmen. It is thus, in spite of its still greater length (694 chapters to 466), a kind of appendix to Aristides' case, expanding just one element in it at greater length than the overall presentation in *Or.* 2 would allow. *Or.* 4, finally, is even more obviously a subsidiary item. It is a reply to an individual Platonist friend, one Capito,<sup>3</sup> defending not the whole of Aristides' response, but specifically the use he made in *Or.* 2 of the story of Plato's visits to Sicily.

Why, and how much, does this belated strike-back against Plato matter? To later antiquity, from the third to the sixth century <sc>c.e.</sc>, it mattered considerably, to friend

and foe alike. In the collected edition of Aristides' work from which our manuscript tradition descends, the *Platonic Orations* were placed almost at the head, second only to the *Panathenaic* (*Or.* 1) for their importance in defining their author's intellectual personality and achievement; and in this position, they naturally attracted a heavy volume of annotation, in the form of both introductory essays and exegetic notes.<sup>4</sup> To philosophers, they constituted an attack on Plato substantial enough to demand extensive (and vitriolic) rejection: in the third century the Neoplatonist Porphyry composed a refutation in (it is reported) seven books, and the controversy reverberates still in the sixth century in Olympiodorus's commentary on the *Gorgias*, in which Aristides, "the orator and author of the *Panathenaicus*," is excoriated as a "witterer" (φληναφος).<sup>5</sup> Synesius in his *Dio* (3.5) in the fourth century likewise cites Aristides as an enemy of philosophy, albeit one who combines his enmity with high literary quality.

In the modern period, in contrast, the *Platonic Orations* have until quite recently seemed of less lively concern. In printed editions from the Giuntine *editio princeps* (1517) to Dindorf's (1829) they lose their prominent position in the corpus, and to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship they are a positive embarrassment.<sup>6</sup> Over the last thirty years, however, they have come back into the reckoning as significant evidence for the universe of Greek *paideia* under the Roman Empire. This revival of interest has brought with it a notable shift in perception. Rather than being taken as testimony to a continuing interdisciplinary hostility between philosophy and oratory (rhetoric), they are now in the main read and valued as evidence of the accommodation between the two that they, among other contemporary and near-contemporary texts, are held to show was comfortably in place by this time.<sup>7</sup>

This is a welcome return to favor, and on the face of it seems to find a very useful and plausible place for the *Platonic Orations* as contributors to our understanding both of the

culture of the Imperial period, and of Aristides' own personal project to establish himself as one of its leading lights. The argument of this article will however be that such readings get the *Orations* wrong, and correspondingly threaten to skew our view both of Aristides, and of the state of play between philosophy and rhetoric as elements of Imperial period *paideia*. In his negotiation between philosophy and rhetoric, and himself and Plato as their champions, Aristides is engaged in a less conciliatory, more aggressive and appropriative venture than current readings envisage; and this venture is in its turn striking evidence of the continuing awkwardness of philosophy and of Plato in his day, in relation not just to rhetoric, but to classicizing *paideia* more generally.

In relation to my own past work, I hope that this fresh analysis of the dynamics and stakes of the *Platonic Orations* will, with regard to Aristides, substantiate the much briefer and more dogmatic statements about their argumentative thrust in the introduction to my Loeb edition of *Or. 2*;<sup>8</sup> as for the standing of philosophy in relation to *paideia*, I hope here to offer a further, and particularly vivid illustration of the picture of uneasy relations that I attempted to sketch in my *Philosophy in the Roman Empire*, and one that refines on it in some important respects.<sup>9</sup> In so far as this is a study that bears on the reception of Plato in the Imperial period, it is also meant to draw attention to a part of the picture notably underplayed in Richard Hunter's otherwise admirable *Plato and the Traditions of Ancient Literature*, and only briefly touched on in Ryan Fowler's chapter in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plato in Antiquity*.<sup>10</sup>

#### <sc>A CONCILIATORY APPROACH?</sc>

On one level, it is true, Aristides throughout the *Platonic Orations* maintains a studied—one might almost say ostentatiously polite—attitude towards philosophy as a discipline, above all as part of his demonstration of how much better he is than Plato at observing the proprieties.

Thus, when he rejects Plato's characterization of oratory as equivalent to cookery in *Gorgias* 463a–465c as mere unargued, bullying assertion, he illustrates the point by observing that you could with equal justice replace “oratory” with “philosophy” every time Plato uses the word in his tirade—but that of course no sane person would ever think to do such a thing (*Or.* 2.23–31). The implication is left hanging that philosophy might in fact deserve to be treated in this way, but the surface message is the request that oratory be treated with as much respect by Plato as Aristides of course shows to philosophy. Similarly, in *Or.* 2.258–60, he argues that a discipline is not automatically discredited by the existence of a few rogue practitioners, and points to the cases of atheists and corruptors like Diagoras and Anaxagoras to show that this is as true of philosophy as it is of oratory. Here too the surface message is of decent respect, even if a damaging innuendo may lurk beneath it.

It is also very obviously true that at many points in the *Platonic Orations* Aristides is as loud and insistent in his praise of Plato, and in declarations of his own admiration and affection, as he is in his praise of (the right kind of) philosophy. At the end of *Or.* 2, he can retrospectively picture the exchange of views between himself and “Plato, the father and teacher of orators” as an exchange of toasts between friends, as if at some banquet of the cultural aristocracy.<sup>11</sup> Defending himself in *Or.* 4 against Capito's criticism of the argument in *Or.* 2, he claims to be at one with his critic in valuing Plato “as much as I do my own person.”<sup>12</sup> In *Or.* 3 he declares that he “would rather condemn [him]self to the most extreme punishment than willingly withhold the highest praise from Plato,” three times characterizes him as “the best of the Greeks,” and invokes Aeschylus to underline his refusal to have “anyone who is not a friend to this man and does not honor him as he deserves” as “comrade in arms or anywhere near me.”<sup>13</sup>

Aristides has a very clear and solid motive for highlighting his respect for Plato in this way, for Plato is a universally acknowledged representative of the pantheon of great figures

of Hellenic *paideia* that—as we know also from the *Sacred Tales*—he wishes to be seen as belonging himself.<sup>14</sup> This consideration perhaps already begins to break cover with the image of the aristocratic toast at the end of *Or.* 2, but is made clearest in the closing stages of *Or.* 3, particularly in the peroration in §§692–94, where after a pained review of what is presented as Plato’s baffling and perverse impulses to mock any and every form of Greek cultural achievement, from political oratory to tragedy, comedy and dithyramb (605–26, 627–62), Aristides exhorts him to forget such silliness and come back into the fold:

ἡμεῖς δὲ γνωρίζωμεν ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς καὶ μὴ φυρώμεθα ὥσπερ ἐν νυκτομαχίᾳ, μηδὲ τοῦτό γε ἔν, κακὸν Ἑλληνικόν, μιμώμεθα, στασιάζοντες περὶ τῆς ἡγεμονίας, ἀλλ[ά] ... παρέχωμεν ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ τεταγμένῳ καὶ γιγνώμεθα τοιοῦτοι περὶ τοὺς πρότερον οἴουσπερ ἂν αὖ τοὺς ὕστερον εἶναι περὶ ἡμᾶς βουλοίμεθα. αἰσχρὸν γάρ, ὥς γ’ ἔφη Δημοσθένης, οὓς οὐδ’ ἂν τῶν ἐχθρῶν καὶ τῶν πολεμίων οὐδεὶς ἂν ἀποστερήσειεν τῶν εὐφημιῶν, τούτους ὑφ’ ἡμῶν, οἱ προσήκομεν αὐτοῖς, μὴ τῆς γιγνομένης αἰδοῦς καὶ φιλανθρωπίας τυγχάνειν.

[L]et us recognize each other and not become confused like people fighting in the dark; let the great Greek vice of splitting into factions to fight over precedence be the one that we decline to imitate ... keeping to our appointed stations and behaving towards those who have gone before us as we would wish those who come after us in our turn to behave towards us. As Demosthenes said, it is a shameful thing that those whom not even a single one of their personal enemies or opponents in war would rob of their good name, should not be granted the proper respect and good will by us, their own.

Recent readings of the *Platonic Orations* take laudatory and conciliatory moments such as these to embody their true thrust and intended final resting-point: after a good fight, in which (as the unwritten rules of ancient controversializing certainly allowed) some vicious blows may have been landed,<sup>15</sup> the contestants shake hands and resume their former amicable relations. The argument that now follows will be that this is unsustainable in the light of a closer examination of the texture and strategies of Aristides’ argumentation. In

fact, he unleashes forces that go far beyond easy reconciliation, into serious undermining of both Plato and philosophy; and the “reconciliation” offered on the basis of the sum total of all he says is one-sided and appropriative rather than any kind of compromise or meeting in the middle. We will look first at the systematic way in which Aristides seeks to undermine Plato’s standing and authority as well as the details of his argument in the *Gorgias*, and then at his treatment of the whole calling of philosophy.

#### <a>THE DISMANTLING OF PLATO’S AUTHORITY<a>

To say that Plato is on trial in the *Platonic Orations*, while conveying broadly the right idea, is not exact.<sup>16</sup> As Antonio Dittadi has correctly underlined, Aristides’ own chosen comparison, near the beginning of *Or. 2*, is with a *graphê paranomôn*, the indictment and scrutiny of a proposed decree or piece of legislation on suspicion of illegality.<sup>17</sup> The “illegal proposal” in this case is of course the *Gorgias* and the condemnation of oratory that lies at its heart. This is an initial characterization of Plato’s venture that immediately puts him on the back foot, as the suspected malefactor, with Aristides as the vigilant defender of right, but it does several other things as well: it suggests both that what follows will involve close examination of texts and wording, and that issues of consistency (as between new proposal and established legislation) will be central. All of this is amply evidenced in the remainder of *Or. 2* and in *Or. 3*, to Plato’s deep discredit.

Plato himself, as the author of the document under examination, is repeatedly addressed—interrogated, reproved, exclaimed at—in the second person. The voice addressing him is not always Aristides’ own—as for example with the *prosopopoea* of the Four to reproach him on their own account in *Or. 3*.365–99—but it is for the vast majority of the time, and it speaks with utter confidence.<sup>18</sup> These notes of confident superiority are at



their loudest and most cutting when, as for instance in *Or.* 2.132–34, Plato is being convicted of inconsistency and self-contradiction.

καὶ μὴν οὐκ ἐμὸς ὁ μῦθος, ἔφη ὁ Πλάτων, τὸ τοῦ Εὐριπίδου προσπαίζων, ἀλλ' ὑμέτερος, ὦ Πλάτων, καὶ τοῦ σοῦ νῆ Δί' ἐργαστηρίου, καὶ τὰς τέχνας ταύτας βαναύσους καὶ τοὺς ἐπ' αὐτῶν ἀνδραποδῶδεις εἶναι. οὐκοῦν ἄτοπον καὶ περιφανῆς συκοφαντία τοῖς μὲν ἃς εἶπον τέχνας εἰδόσι καὶ τοῖς ἄλλας μυρίας μηδενὸς ἀξιοῦν μετεῖναι χρηστοῦ παρὰ τὴν τέχνην, εἰ δέ τις μὴ τέχνη τι μετέρχεται, διὰ τοῦτ' αὐτὸν ψέγειν ὡς ἐνὸς τῶν βεβαίως καλῶν στερόμενον, καὶ τοὺς αὐτοὺς ὑμᾶς ἅμα μὲν μηδένα ποιεῖσθαι τῆς τέχνης λόγον, ἀλλὰ καὶ προφέρειν αὐτὸ τοῖς πολλοῖς, ἅμα δὲ ὡς καθαρῶς ἀγαθὸν τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο σεμνύνειν, ὅ τι ἂν μὴ τέχνη γίγνηται κακίζοντας. καὶ μὴν ἐλοῦ γε δυοῖν θάτερον, εἴποι δικαίως ἂν ἡ ῥητορική, ἢ καὶ τοὺς χειροτέχνας ὡς καλοὺς κἀγαθοὺς τιμᾶν, ἢ τοὺς γε ῥήτορας μὴ ψέγειν, εἰ μὴ τέχνην κέκτηνται περὶ ᾧ λέγουσιν.

Indeed, ‘the tale is not mine’, as Plato said, playing on the line from Euripides, but yours, Plato; it is you and so help me your whole factory, who say that these crafts are menial and their practitioners servile. It is then extraordinary and a blatant piece of slander to claim that the masters of the crafts I have mentioned, and thousands more, are not pursuing any worthwhile activity in the exercise of their science, but at the same time, if someone pursues his ends without exercising a science, to criticize him for this very reason as lacking one of the securely fine things of life. You people simultaneously grant no value to science, but go so far as to use it as a way of insulting the masses, and at the same time cry it up as an unsullied good and speak ill of anything that does not come about by its agency. “Choose one or the other,” rhetoric would have every right to say, either respect craftsmen as gentlemen, or refrain from criticizing orators for not being in possession of a science that bears on their subject.”

As already observed, this unmasking of Plato’s inconsistencies is one of the central argumentative strategies of both orations, though most particularly of *Or.* 2. Aristides’ star instances, the ones he builds up to most carefully and emphasizes most triumphantly when he

produces them, are those internal to the *Gorgias* itself: the concessions that there can be such a thing as a good, knowledge-based, instructive oratory in *Grg.* 503a, and that there was at least one good Athenian orator-statesman, namely Aristides the Just, in *Grg.* 526b.<sup>19</sup> But cases such as these are only part of a larger pattern. Also close to the heart of the argument are the discrepancies between the differing views taken of “unscientific” discourse in the *Gorgias* and in the *Phaedrus* (*Phdr.* 244a–45b, cited and discussed in *Or.* 2.52–60), and the different weight given to avoiding the suffering of wrong as well as avoiding the doing of it in the *Gorgias* and in *Epistle Seven* (*Ep.* VII 328c–29a, cited and discussed in *Or.* 2.285–300). And both orations are strewn with a series of yet other instances, noted in passing, where Plato can again be recruited against himself, to the disadvantage of his case in *Gorgias*:

Because I do not need many witnesses to prove that a city needs its subsidies and that even the haughtiest of its citizens cannot dispense with volunteering funds and performing acts of philanthropy; one witness, the very best in Greece, is enough for me. Who is that? You, Plato. When furnishing your blessed and virtuous city with Guardians—how could a city that has Plato for its founder not be blessed?—you specify payment for them from public resources, as if you yourself were not recommending anything disgraceful and as if neither party among them, neither the prospective givers nor the prospective receivers, were going to do anything disgraceful either. If this payment is neither silver nor gold, but something else, that is a different point: I think it is perfectly reasonable for forms of payment to be relative to types of constitution ... what matters is not what form the payment takes, but whether you have mentioned payment at all—unless it is the case that Euneos sent the Achaeans wine for free, simply because they did not settle up with him with silver,

but some “with bronze and some with flashing iron.” Not even Euneos himself said anything as idiotic as that.<sup>20</sup>

The knowingness of this strategy, of recruiting Plato as witness against his own views, should not be underestimated. It is precisely in the *Gorgias* that Plato most insistently makes self-consistency a condition of truth,<sup>21</sup> and here, Aristides gleefully points out, is Plato himself failing to live up to that condition, not only between the *Gorgias* and his other works, but even within the *Gorgias* itself. The taunt would be compounded if we were justified in seeing, with Karadimas and Flintermann, an echo also of Socrates’ insistence in *Gorgias* 472b–c that in a proper, philosophical, truth-seeking encounter, the most vital thing is to secure the agreement of the one person you are talking to.<sup>22</sup> This is perhaps part of the point in *Or.* 2.277–78:

καὶ μὴν ἐν μὲν οἷς ἡμεῖς λέγομεν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις συνδοκοῦν ἐστὶν καὶ τῷ Πλάτῳ πρόσεστιν· ἃ δ' οὗτος ἐνταῦθα εἶρηκεν, οὐ μόνον τοῖς τῶν πραγμάτων λόγοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐξελέγχεται καὶ λόγοις καὶ βουλήμασιν. ἐκείνων μὲν οὖν ὀρθῶς ἔχειν συγχωρουμένων καὶ ἢ παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων μαρτυρεῖ δόξα καὶ ψῆφος ὀρθή· ταῦτα δ' εἰ δοίημεν κρατεῖν, ἄπεστιν τὸ ὁτῶοῦν συνδοκεῖν τῶν ἄλλων. ἰσχυρότερον δὲ τὸ καὶ ἅπασιν καὶ Πλάτῳ τοῦ μηδενὶ καὶ μηδὲ Πλάτῳ συνδοκεῖν, ὥς οὗτος ἀλλαχοῦ. οὐκοῦν οὐ τὴν παρὰ τούτου μαρτυρίαν διὰ τὴν παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων φευξόμεθα, ἀλλὰ τῇ τῶν ἄλλων τὴν παρὰ τούτου προσθήσομεν.

Moreover, what I say commands agreement from everyone else, and from Plato too; but what he says here is proved wrong not only by the voice of fact, but also by the words and wishes of Plato himself. If it is allowed that my case is correct, it is supported by the opinion and right judgment of everyone else as well; but if we were to grant the victory to his argument, then no agreement would be forthcoming from anyone else at all. To have everyone’s agreement and Plato’s too is a stronger position than having agreement from nobody, not even Plato, as he appears

elsewhere. We shall not therefore reject his testimony because of everyone else's, but rather add his to theirs.

Taking stock so far, we may say that there is a strong element of personal, one-to-one confrontationalism in the *Platonic Orations*, one which indeed already puts them in a class of their own as orator's or rhetorician's responses to *Gorgias*; neither Cicero nor Quintilian in their reassertions of the scientific status of oratory ever faced up to Plato in such a way as this.<sup>23</sup> What is also already abundantly clear is the overtly and self-consciously oratorical nature of Aristides' riposte to Plato as the master of dialectic: oratorical not only in overall form (the presentation and justification of a *graphê paranomôn*) but also in argumentative strategy (the detection of internal and external inconsistencies). This does not, however, mean that Aristides simply refuses to engage with the philosophical texture of the *Gorgias*, or of Plato's work more generally.

Detection of inconsistency is a tool of philosophical as well as oratorical polemic, and it is one that depends for its impact on close, even if unfriendly familiarity with the words of one's adversary. Aristides makes it very clear in the course of delivering his rebuttal that he knows his Plato: that his response to the passage of the *Gorgias* that he takes as his target is grounded in an acquaintance with the collected works which allows him both to cite a very wide range of different dialogues, with a good awareness of how their contents compare and contrast with the target text, and to engage in close textual scrutiny of key passages. This is anything but ignorant and ill-informed criticism. Besides the initial target, *Gorgias* 463a–65c at *Or.* 2.22, substantial chunks of Plato are cited verbatim in *Or.* 2.52 (*Phdr.*), 2.285 (*Ep. VII*), 2.304 (*Leg.*), 2.324–7 (*Ep. VIII*), 2.344–46 (*Grg.*), 2.438 (*Plt.*), 2.457 (*Euthyd.*), 3.272, 280 and 284 (*Ep. VIII*), 3.401 (*Grg.*), 3.489 and 496–97 (*Ap.*), 3.519 (*Ap.*), 3.536–39 (*Grg.*), 3.560–62 (*Leg.*), and 3.564 (*Phdr.*). The total list of works quoted from or referred to embraces, besides *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Menexenus*, *Euthydemus*, *Apology*, *Politicus*,

*Laws* and *Epistles VII* and *VIII* already mentioned, also *Alcibiades I*, *Protagoras*, *Symposium* and *Timaeus*, with the *Protagoras* in particular, attracting attention on more than one occasion and in more than one of its aspects.<sup>24</sup>

The operations that Plato's text is thus subjected to by Aristides suggests comparison with several contemporary modes of attention to philosophical works.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps most obviously, the sustained concentration on just one work is reminiscent of a commentary. For Aristides does much more than just scrutinize the wording and reasoning of the primary target passage from the *Gorgias* (463a–65c, quoted verbatim in *Or.* 2.22). In the *loci* listed above, and in further passages that involve summary rather than substantial direct quotation, he examines subsequent stages in Plato's exposition and argument, passing judgement not only on questions of consistency and plausibility, but also of organization and persuasive strategy. So, having picked over and rewritten *Gorgias* 463a–65c in *Or.* 2.23–31,<sup>26</sup> he subsequently focuses in the remainder of *Or.* 2 on the lines of Pindar on *nomos* quoted by Callicles in *Grg.* 484b (2.226–31), the case of the tyrant Archelaus from *Grg.* 471b–d (2.237–43), the discussion of doing versus suffering wrong in *Grg.* 469b–c (2.261–305), the dismissal of the Four in *Grg.* 515c–19d (2.319–43), and the question of the value of saving lives in *Grg.* 511c ff. (2.362–81). In *Or.* 3, focusing again on the verdict on the Four, he unpicks and contests the illustrative examples (herdsmen, charioteers) that Plato uses to undermine them in *Grg.* 516a and 516e (3.400–408), and in 3.633–42 he suggests how the whole of the conclusion of Socrates' conversation with Callicles about the Four might have been rewritten if Plato had been content to adhere to reasonable standards of argumentation. Aristides thus engages with the whole texture and sequence of the *Gorgias* and as already seen tailors his rejoinder so as not only to refute its central claims, but also to echo many of its subordinate emphases along the way.

The parallel with a commentary, however, although certainly suggestive is by no means perfect. For one thing, Aristides does not proceed, as Olympiodorus for instance will subsequently do with the *Gorgias*, by the elaborate unfolding of key phrases and the unsuspected weight of meaning lurking beneath them,<sup>27</sup> and for another the adversarial tone and intention do not match up to the standard model of a commentary. From this point of view, another comparison suggests itself instead, with the kind of polemical examination of an intellectual adversary's views that is represented by Plutarch's controversialist essays (e.g., *Stoicorum Repugnantia*, *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*, *Adversus Colotem*).<sup>28</sup> Like Aristides, Plutarch seeks to undermine his opponents, not always in the fairest of ways, as unwittingly confused and divided against themselves; as with Aristides, the juxtaposition of widely separated passages from the opponent is a key tool. On the other hand, Plutarch's controversial works do not confine themselves to single target texts, and are noticeably more uncompromising in their desire to annihilate their opponents' intellectual credit. The *Platonic Orations*, we might then say, flirt with both commentary and controversialist mode, but in the end represent a mode of critical engagement identical with neither, and indeed hard to parallel at all closely in texts of the period.

But to return to the theme of the dismantling of Plato's authority. By his sustained critical scrutiny of the *Gorgias* in comparison with his other relevant output, delivered in a consistently confrontational tone, Aristides shows him to be multiply at odds with himself in his central claims about oratory and orators, implausible in the intellectual schemata on which he relies, and unpersuasive in his selection of illustrative examples. But this is by no means all. He convicts him also of ineptitude in his choice of argumentative strategies, deviousness in his arrangement of his materials, and casual disregard for factual accuracy.

The charge of ineptitude is levelled at the beginning of *Oration 3*, with the observation that, in choosing to attack the Four as he did, Plato was doing something not only unnecessary

for his main argument about oratory, but also calculated to alienate the very person Socrates in the dialogue was trying to persuade, namely Callicles. The criticism is made in 3.4–6, and resumed in the suggested rewrite of the ending of the conversation with Callicles that is made in 3.633–42. The charge of deviousness comes in *Oration* 2.348–50, where Aristides comments on how Plato sought to conceal the damaging admission of a contradiction between his scorn for the Four and his praise of Aristides the Just by tucking the latter away, much further on in the dialogue than the former, where it would be less conspicuous: “I do not think it is unintentional or insignificant or casual that this mention sits somewhere in the middle of the myth; Plato put it there so as to conceal it as far as possible, and so that, if someone did find it and make use of it, it would not be thought that he had ignored it.”

Most striking of all is the development given to the charge of deliberate carelessness over fact. Having summarized the multiple ways in which Plato is inconsistent with himself in 3.511–76, Aristides moves on in 577–87 to observe that the freedom Plato thus allows himself from normal standards extends beyond this, to his diction, his chronology and his nomenclature. The main examples he cites are the chronological impossibilities involved in having Socrates in the *Menexenus* refer to the Peace of Antalcidas, which was made (counting up the archons) fourteen years after his execution,<sup>29</sup> and in having Socrates, Agathon, Aristophanes and a still young Alcibiades in the same place at the same time in the *Symposium*; but he swipes also at Aristophanes’ hiccups in *Symposium* (clearly in his view just invented for satirical purposes) and at what he sees as a willful confusion of Naucratis with Hermoupolis in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>30</sup> It all points to the conclusion, he suggests, that Plato’s dialogues overall are “pretty much fictions (*plasmata*), which can be woven together from whatever elements one chooses” and show “a less than pressing concern for truth.” This is a striking characterization of the dialogues, which rightly attracted Flintermann’s attention,<sup>31</sup> but it is of course in context anything but a disinterested piece of literary criticism, as is

underlined by the conclusion to this phase of Aristides' argumentation. As a final instance of Plato's slippery unreliability as a writer, he reminds his audience, with what looks like a mixture of impatience and incredulity, of the famous disclaimer from *Epistle II*: “‘there is no piece of writing by Plato, nor will there ever be ... these are instead the works of a Socrates grown young and handsome.’ So (*eita*) were they written not by the man who wrote but by the man who did not?”<sup>32</sup>

For all that he acknowledges Plato as a master-orator (*Orr.* 2.15, 2.465, 3.73, etc.), Aristides thus clearly enjoys eating away at his credit, and puts a great deal of energy and ingenuity into doing so, both in invention and in delivery. Much of his criticism, unsurprisingly, is rhetorical in orientation, teaching Plato lessons in good argumentative strategy and persuasive propriety. But there is also a definite sense of Plato being challenged on his own philosophical and expressive territory as well. For a philosophical intellect, it is surely bad news to have it pointed out that one's conceptual categories fly in the face of universal experience (*Or.* 3.588–604), or that crucial, load-bearing arguments depend on neglecting crucial facts about causation in the human world (*Or.* 3.461–98), or on failure to appreciate the true implications of one's own terminology (*Or.* 2.135–77); and still worse news to be convicted over and over again of failure to show a characteristic (consistency) that one has oneself insisted on in the work in which, more than any other, one has set out to define good philosophical method. For someone who has made dialogue—reported philosophical conversation—central to his work, it is demeaning to be told that one of his more substantial efforts takes a radically wrong direction, and to have the offending stages rewritten for him (*Or.* 3.633–42, cf. 2.23–31). For someone who has made philosophical myth a significant element in his dialogues, it is again a blow to have one of them appropriated and rewritten for purposes of which he would strongly disapprove—as Aristides does with his revision and repurposing of the *Protagoras* myth in favor of oratory in *Or.* 2.394–99.



Active rewriting, which we find with the foundation myth of oratory, and the revisions to two key passages of the *Gorgias*, indeed implies that the rewriter is not just an armchair critic, but can do these things better in actual practice. The implication is reinforced by a number of further passages in which Aristides essays something more like free composition of his own in philosophical mode.<sup>33</sup> A neat example is provided by *Or.* 2.105–7. Here Aristides constructs a quick-fire logical chain of argument, to establish the priority of invention over learning, and thus of natural ability over human science. If only briefly, we have a burst of dialectic; but this burst of dialectic is delivered by the orator Aristides, just to show he can do it every bit as well as any philosopher ever could:

εἰ γὰρ ἦν τὸ μαθεῖν ἄριστον καὶ πρῶτον, οὐδὲ ἂν αὐτὸ πρῶτον τὸ μαθεῖν ἦν. ἐχρῆν γὰρ δήπου μαθεῖν παρ' ἐτέρου. ὥστε οὐκ ἂν ἦν ὁ διδάσκων πρῶτος, εἰ τὸ μαθεῖν κρεῖττον καὶ πρῶτον ἦν. παρὰ τοῦ γάρ, ὧ καὶ σὺ τὴν ποικίλην κοσμήσας, ἀκούσῃ, τίσι πεισθῇ, εἰ κρεῖττων ὁ μαθὼν ἐστὶ τοῦ τὸ πρῶτον εὐρόντος, καὶ μὴ ἀνάγκη δεύτερος, εἴπερ τι μέλλει μαθήσεσθαι. πᾶς γὰρ ὁ μανθάνων ὡμολόγηκεν δήπουθεν εἶναι χείρων αὐτῷ γε τῷ δεῖσθαι μαθεῖν· ὥς εἴ γε μὴ πείσειεν αὐτὸν δεῖσθαι πρότερον, πῶς ἂν μάθοι, ἢ πῶς ἄλλω γ' ἂν εἰπόντι πεισθείη; οὐκοῦν ἄτοπον τὸν γε αὐτὸν ὡμολογηκότα εἶναι χείρω, τοῦτον ἀμείνω καλεῖν, καὶ ταῦτα δι' αὐτὸ τοῦτ' ἐπαινούμενον, ὅτι ὡμολόγηκεν χείρων εἶναι.

Because if learning were best and came first, learning would not in fact come first, since there would of course have to be someone else to learn from, so that the teacher would not be first, if learning were superior and came first. You, sir, who adorned the Painted Stoa, tell me who he is to learn from, and what lessons he is to learn, if the learner is really superior to the man who invents things in the first place, and not necessarily second, if he is going to learn anything? Any learner surely automatically confesses to being inferior by the very fact of needing to learn, since if he had not first convinced himself of his need, how could he learn, or take heed of someone else's words? It is thus strange to call better the one who has confessed himself to be

inferior, and is moreover commended for the very action of confessing himself inferior.<sup>34</sup>

Enclosed within the oratorical form of *Orr.* 2 and 3, therefore, we find not only critique of Plato's performance in argument and as composer of dialogues, but also mimetic rewriting of selected Platonic passages and free composition in philosophizing style. When a couple of further factors are taken into account, it becomes not just legitimate but highly tempting to ask whether these are the signs of a conscious, and once more highly aggressive, strategy on Aristides' part. As already observed, Plato throughout both orations is repeatedly addressed in the second person, in criticism, challenge and reproach. The initial basis for this is his status as "defendant" in the examination that Aristides is conducting, which automatically puts him in line for a certain amount of direct address; but there are places where the second person mode is notably extended, and some where it edges close to open dialogue—more in the style of Plato's adaptation of forensic style in the *Apology* (the interpolated "dialogue" with Meletus in 24c–28a) than that of a standard oratorical product. So, for instance in *Or.* 2.141–2, Aristides constructs an imagined exchange between an unnamed interlocutor (standing for himself) and Plato on the definition of archery, with a clear verbal echo of *Grg.* 451b:

Think pray what would happen if someone were to ask him, using his very own turn of phrase, "Plato, do you know a science of archery, at least so as to be able to speak of it, and use that name? You have certainly given an exhaustive account of political science and established with precision what its subdivisions are." "Yes I do know it," he would say, "and I do use that name." "So what is it, and what does it undertake to do?" "To hit the target in the firing of projectiles." "Good. Then when it takes aim, it hits the target?" "Of course." "Is it therefore not a science because of the fact that it takes aim, or is it the science of just this, taking aim?" "The latter, I believe."

In the same vein Plato is made to answer back 2.279–88, on the strength of *Epistle VII*, about his motives for visiting Sicily; and in 3.306–7, again in connection with the Sicilian adventure, Aristides once more apostrophizes a Plato under attack and answering back to his critics. The effect is only enhanced when, in passages such as 3.135 or 3.302, Plato is addressed with his own vocatives (ὦ θαυμάσιε, ὦ φίλη κεφαλή, etc).<sup>35</sup> On another level, a sense of dialogue, this time more clearly between Plato and Aristides, is fostered by the sheer quantity of *verbatim* quotation from his works: Plato speaks directly, from his works, on page after page, and the texture of both orations becomes for the reader an alternation between his voice and Aristides’.

Critics have duly noted the intimations of dialogue, and Dittadi in particular has examined more generally the extent to which the *Platonic Orations* might be viewed as an exercise in the corrective rewriting of Plato,<sup>36</sup> but there may be a more forceful point to be made here, about the shrewdness and skill as well as the mechanics of Aristides’ polemical strategy. Rewriting is of course a procedure with a long pedigree and deep roots in rhetorical culture, in both more and less pointed forms, from the confrontational device of *refutatio sententiae* to the kinds of appreciative paraphrase (*paraphrasis*) recommended as training by Quintilian and Theon and (according again to Theon) exemplified repeatedly in the speeches of Demosthenes.<sup>37</sup> An extra dimension however accrues when the target author is Plato. For Plato himself was a great rewriter and parodist, as evidenced, among many possible examples, by the speeches of the *Symposium* (especially the first five, from Phaedrus to Agathon), “Aspasia’s” funeral oration in the *Menexenus*, or the ventriloquizing of Lysias in the *Phaedrus* or Protagoras and Hippias in the *Protagoras*. Rewriting Plato is thus at the very least another neat piece of table-turning, justified *ad hominem* by his own provocative practice. But more yet may be at stake.

Recent criticism—above all Andrea Wilson Nightingale in her 1995 study *Genres in Dialogue*<sup>38</sup>—has painted a convincing picture of Plato as himself a purposeful generic aggressor, who in his parodies and imitations sets out to appropriate whole rival forms of expression—tragedy, comedy, “Presocratic” natural science, epideictic oratory—and thus to relativize them to philosophy as a master discourse. Platonic parody and pastiche in this perspective emerge as elements in a larger strategy rather than merely localized pieces of teasing and play. We have seen Aristides, manifestly in some sense paying Plato back in his own coin in quotation, cross questioning and rewriting. But if we can also see him—as will emerge below<sup>39</sup>—claiming philosophy as a subordinate kind of oratory, by which it is, or should be, in some sense enclosed and controlled, does it not begin to seem plausible to credit him too with a larger generic vision, articulated in theory but also enacted in the actual texture of the orations? In allowing Plato to speak, engaging in direct and indirect exchange with him, trading myth for myth, analytical schema for analytical schema, and stretch of reasoning with stretch of reasoning, he also engulfs him, along with the whole discourse of philosophy for which he stands, in an oratorical embrace—oratorical in overall form and structure, in strategies of argumentation, and in the self-presentation of the principal speaking voice. Plato may stage dialogues, in which there is the appearance of an interplay between independent voices, but this apparent polyphony is a sham, masking the responsibility of a single playwright.<sup>40</sup> Besides corralling Plato within his oratorical structure, Aristides can also claim the greater honesty, in admitting—indeed, loudly asserting—his own responsibility for the whole product.

<a>CHARACTER ASSASSINATION?<a>

Aristides' assault on Plato's credit does not however end with issues of argumentative competence and generic priority. Also at issue are Plato's own record of practical action, and his character.

Where the practical record is concerned, the main exhibit, scrutinized in both *Oration 2* and *Oration 3*, is the Sicilian venture.<sup>41</sup> In *Or.* 2.279–98, the (moderately, if backhandedly flattering) point of the scrutiny is to show that, whatever he may have said *pour besoin de la cause* in the *Gorgias*, in actual practice Plato attached as much importance to preventing the suffering of wrong as he did to preventing the doing of it; otherwise he would not have tried as very hard as *Epistle VII* shows he did to save his friend Dion from being wronged. In *Oration 3*.306–7 and 368–72, however, the emphasis shifts to the ineffectiveness of his interventions: despite his best efforts, Plato failed both to help Dion and to improve Dionysius, and suffered a string of personal indignities into the bargain—in marked contrast to the sterling records of the Four. These indignities included (3.440–45) being subjected to just the kind of disloyalty on the part of close associates that Plato tried to make such a reproach against the Four. Besides his own record, moreover, Plato is also discredited by association with Socrates, whose “achievements” in making the people of Athens pointlessly talkative (3.70–71) and in failing to improve his close associates (3.433–39) made the shortcomings of the Four seem venial by comparison. Not wholly consistently with this, Aristides tries also to do Plato down by driving a number of wedges between him and his fellow Socratics: in divergences between him and Xenophon (2.301–3), and in the signs he claims to detect that Plato was not above misrepresenting even his master Socrates on occasion—as witness the discrepancy between the Platonic Socrates's view of Pericles and that taken by the Socrates recorded by the more prosaic, but therefore more reliable Aeschines (3.348–51).

On the question of loyalty, inferences about the facts of the career join up with inferences about character, which constitute a final, and in some ways, most insidiously damning line of attack. Two traits, already well noted by Pernot,<sup>42</sup> stand out in Aristides' account. The first is Plato's perverse competitiveness (*philonikia*), his obsessive desire to do down perceived rivals, especially if they are otherwise distinguished. Aristides highlights this unlovely trait briefly in *Or.* 4, in justifying his own use of the facts of the Sicilian venture to criticize Plato in *Or.* 2.<sup>43</sup> A more elaborate treatment comes, however, towards the end of *Oration* 3, in paragraphs 605–26, where Plato's jealous attacks on any and every icon of Hellenism are unfavorably contrasted with the more discriminating vitriol of Archilochus's satire (610–12), and where the celebrated command to Socrates to “make music” (*Phd.* 60e–61b) is reinterpreted as even better advice to his wayward pupil (624–26). But unfavorable comment on the same tendency is also passed in *Orr.* 2.161 and 320 and 3.567. The other main character trait of Aristides' Plato takes us back to the allegation of carelessness over factual accuracy, made in *Or.* 3.577–87. For Aristides has a diagnosis of what lies at its root, and is also, to some extent, responsible for his disrespect for the greats of the past. The problem lies in Plato's natural genius, the sheer greatness of his nature (577, 586, 663). It is this that induces a lofty, aristocratic (Aristides actually says “kingly”) scorn for reputation and for pedantic precision, and this in turn on occasion tips him over the edge from legitimate disagreement into casual, insouciant insults and factual slips that his better part does not really intend.

This is wonderfully clever polemic. It offers a deliciously, teasingly weighted verdict, ambiguously balanced between acknowledgement of Plato as a superior being, to whom normal criteria do not apply, and reproof to him for a kind of silliness he could and should have known better than to succumb to. As such, it provides a particularly subtle answer to the old question of how to play off discontent with Plato against the necessity of acknowledging

his genius. At the same time this is a strategy which also, with one of its two poles, offers one of the most deeply dismissive characterizations of Plato of them all.

In this connection, it pays to consider not only the argumentative panache of the *Platonic Orations* in themselves, but also their place in a longer history of engagements with Plato. In one perspective, the insistently personal tone of their response, and their willingness to go further in carrying the fight to the opposition, makes them stand out in comparison with attempts to negotiate with the Plato of the *Gorgias* on the part of other, earlier defenders of oratory and rhetoric, such as Cicero and Quintilian.<sup>44</sup> But in another perspective, they can at the same time be seen as firmly inserted into a longer anti-Platonic tradition: that known to us now above all from Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Athenaeus, and their retrospection on other earlier figures now lost to us such as Zoilus and Herodicus.<sup>45</sup>

In the first place, whatever else he is working with or reacting to, Aristides must across the three orations be engaging, directly or indirectly, with the critically slanted treatment of Platonic style in Dionysius of Halicarnassus's *On the Style of Demosthenes* and *Letter to Gnaeus Pompeius*. Scholars have pointed to the parallel between Dionysius's unapologetic apology in the *Letter* for his censure of Plato's "dithyrambic" tendencies in the *Demosthenes*, and Aristides' in the *Response to Capito* for his use of Plato's Sicilian adventures in *Oration 2*.<sup>46</sup> But the parallel arguably extends also to the spirit of the initial criticism as well: Aristides' diagnosis of Plato going irresponsibly with the flow of his "great nature" looks suspiciously like a development of Dionysius's more restrictedly stylistic judgement, which also censures Plato's ("dithyrambic") excesses as an almost accidental falling below his own high standards (*Dem.* 6: τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀμαρτήματα ἐν ταῖς κατασκευαῖς εἴωθεν ἀμαρτάνειν καὶ χείρων .. αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ γίνεται); the temptation to make this association is only increased by the fact that both Aristides and Dionysius are in the business of unfavorable comparisons between Plato and Demosthenes, with Aristides again

expanding what is for Dionysius a stylistic judgement into a broader assessment of character and motivation.

But engagement with the anti-Platonic tradition can also be seen in the chronological arguments of *Or.* 3.577–87. The focus on the blatant anachronisms of *Symposium* in particular recalls the attacks on Platonic chronology reported in Book 5 of Athenaeus's *Deipnosophists*, where very similar comments are made about the impossibility of bringing that particular cast-list together in the same place at the same time, together with further complaints about the relative dating of Pericles and Archelaus in the *Gorgias* (503c), and the grand but impossible gathering of sophists in the *Protagoras*.<sup>47</sup> Like everything in Athenaeus, this assault on Plato is reported from earlier sources, apparently in particular the second-century b.c.e. critic Herodicus ("Herodicus the Crateteian") in his work entitled *To the Socrates-lover*,<sup>48</sup> though other sources too may be being laid under contribution at this point, perhaps from the list of anti-Platonists provided by Dionysius at *Ep. Pomp.* 757 (Cephisodorus, Theopompus, Zoilus, Hippodamus, Demetrius, "and many others"). Here too at all events we see a longer-running story in the reception of Plato to which Aristides in the *Platonic Orations* is making his own unique contribution, building the chronological worry into a larger picture of Plato's perceived shortcomings as both author and agent. And it is an affinity that once more emphasizes the aggressive set of the *Orations*, and the inadequacy of a conciliationist reading.

#### <a>THE TAMING OF PHILOSOPHY<a>

Plato, then, is ostensibly praised, but under cover of this token show of respect is relentlessly battered across all three of the *Orations*, both over the specifics of his criticism of oratory and over his life, character and writings more generally. It may still in a sense be right to say, with Pernot, that Aristides is seeking to find "a Plato acceptable to the orators," but what is now clear is that this Plato he is after is a severely chastened and controlled one: accepted as



a genius and as the Hellenic icon Aristides wants him to be, only on condition he relinquishes the extremes and perversities into which that genius can carry him. How is it then with the calling he stands for, philosophy?

Aristides' surface expressions of respect for philosophy have already been noted, but as was the case with Plato, they are very far from being the whole story. Woven through the fabric of both orations is both a more overt marginalization of philosophy as a discipline and a series of less veiled disparagements of philosophers.<sup>49</sup> Much of this is of course delivered via what is said about Plato, as the supreme representative of the calling: where he is shown to fall down in motivation and in technical competence, the discipline is disparaged too. But the attack is also pressed home on a broader front. Most fundamentally, the picture of the nature of oratory that Aristides constructs in rebutting Plato's criticisms seems to be claiming not only a parity of esteem with philosophy, but a positive superiority, such as at least to subordinate its rival, and perhaps to squeeze it out altogether.

Both maneuvers hinge on the term and concept at the center of the tussle with Plato and the *Gorgias*, *logos*. In *Or.* 2.450, in the course of finally rejecting the notion that there can be any such thing as a bad form of oratory (since "bad oratory" is simply not oratory at all), Aristides remarks in passing that "One might even say, whether correctly or not, that dialectic may perhaps be a category of oratory, just as questions are a category of speech (*logos*) in general. But let us leave that for another time." And in *Or.* 3.509, in contrasting Plato with Demosthenes, he says:

μή τω φαυλοτέρα τῆς διαλεκτικῆς ἡ ῥητορικὴ φαίνεται. καίτοι ἔγωγ' ὥμην οὐ πάνυ ταῦτ' ἀλλήλων κεχωρίσθαι, ἀλλ' εἶναι τὴν διαλεκτικὴν μέρος τι τῆς ῥητορικῆς, ὥσπερ τὴν ἐρώτησιν τοῦ παντὸς λόγου, καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ὄνπερ τοῖς δρομεῦσι μέτεστι τοῦ βαδίζειν, οὐ μὴν τοῖς βαδίζουσιν ἅπασιν τὸ θεῖν οἷόν τε, οὕτω καὶ τοὺς ῥητορικοὺς πρὸς τοὺς διαλεκτικοὺς ἔχειν.

Let nobody think oratory inferior in value to dialectic. I myself would have thought that the two are not entirely separate from each other, and that dialectic is a

constituent part of oratory, just as the question is a part of speech in general, and that in the same way as people running can also be said to walk, but not all who walk are able to run, so things also stand between orators and dialecticians.<sup>50</sup>

Philosophy is thus reduced to the status not simply of a parallel discipline, but a definite subordinate, albeit one that in theory might still have some non-negligible role to play. In *Or.* 2. 204–46, moreover, Aristides goes still further: in order to prove that oratory, beyond being just “not irrational” is in fact “rational to the highest degree” (*pleiston logou metechon*) and “the highest thing a man might pray for,” he assigns it a hegemonic role in legislation and the administration of justice, and thus to the order and flourishing of communal human life in general. As is also underlined in the Platonizing myth that follows in 2.394–99, cheekily adapted from the *Protagoras*,<sup>51</sup> this assigns to oratory a position others—Plato especially, in the *Republic* still more emphatically than in the *Gorgias*—would give to philosophy. If this is what oratory is in Aristides’ vision, and this is where it stands, does philosophy have any useful role to play, even as a subordinate discipline?

Philosophers themselves are moreover routinely satirized for their pretension and over-claiming. In *Oration* 2.380–81, Aristides comments sarcastically that for all the airs they give themselves and the social privileges they claim on the basis of their benefactions, they are really no more entitled to gratitude than nurses, schoolmasters and *paidagôgoi* who (to their credit) make no such fuss about themselves.<sup>52</sup> In 3.243 and 258 they are “those who fester in their cheap philosopher’s mantles” and “philosophize in safety,” incapable of acts of practical moral heroism in the real world. In 3.315, they are “the men with long trailing beards ... who venerate Plato to this extreme.” These casual, passing sneers have nothing very original about them—they resonate for instance with many of Lucian’s characterizations<sup>53</sup>—but they create a definite atmosphere of disparagement, at odds with any assertions of respect.

All of this already suggests a different version of the balancing act that can also be observed a century earlier in Quintilian's discussion of Plato, the *Gorgias* and the claims of philosophy in the *Institutio*.<sup>54</sup> Like his predecessor, Aristides seems unwilling to forgo either the pleasures of pulling philosophers down a peg or two, or the credit for showing his appreciation a high intellectual venture; but his inclinations seem much more firmly tilted towards the former. Philosophy, like Plato, is cumulatively, through *Orr.* 2 and 3, being chastened and controlled. Both the product and its practitioners—even the greatest of them—are firmly and none too gently reminded of their legitimate place in the scheme of things and stripped of their pretensions to anything more exalted than the facts allow. The final payoff of this process comes, fittingly, towards the very end of *Or.* 3, where it is tellingly woven together with a final twist to Aristides' critical analysis of Plato's corrosive competitiveness and lofty disregard for fact and propriety.

We have already noted how, in *Or.* 3.605–26, and indeed in the succeeding paragraphs too, Aristides draws attention to the way that Plato's attitudes put him discreditably at odds not just with oratory and with the majority view of the Great Four Athenian statesmen, but with Hellenic values more generally. In pointing this out, Aristides, as Plato's reviewer and corrector, constitutes himself correspondingly as champion not just of oratory, but of Hellenism *tout court*. As §§ 607–9 make explicit, he now speaks for Hellenic culture as a whole, for *all* the greats whom Plato has insouciantly, uncharitably belittled: not just the Great Four Athenian statesmen, but also Homer; not just Homer but also the poets of comedy, tragedy and dithyramb as well. Once you add them all up, you can see just how broad a sweep of Hellenic cultural icons Plato has seen fit to slight, and just how out of tune he is with the finest Greek feeling—just imagine what a Spartan, let alone an Athenian, would say about his disrespect to his elders, and to the honored dead of the great past (646–62)! It is all so stupidly unnecessary: because it is not actually needed to make the argument of the

*Gorgias* cohere, even on Plato's terms (627–45), and because Plato himself at other moments, when he is not indulging his perverse competitive desire to do everyone else down, can (and should) look as Hellenic as the best of them (605, 616).

Thus, Plato is challenged to come off the fence in his attitude to Hellenic culture: will he go with his better instincts, or stick with the perverse, discreditable temptation to distance himself? But with the next breath, in §§ 663–691, which make up the last substantial thrust of the whole confrontation, Aristides also challenges him to position himself with respect to philosophy. Certain reprehensible contemporaries, he reports, have mistakenly assumed that they have Plato's authority for renewed assaults on the good name of the Greek classics, up to and including Demosthenes, and equally mistakenly assumed that in so doing they are behaving as good philosophers should. In fact, both this and their attitude and behavior more generally disqualify them from any such title: they are scruffy, importunate, hypocritical charlatans, who flout all standards of social propriety and literate expression, and do not even know what the words 'sophist' and 'philosopher', which they bandy about so freely, actually mean.

It is easy to conclude, as many critics have, that Aristides is here speaking of contemporary, perhaps Pergamene Cynics;<sup>55</sup> a good deal of what he says does indeed fit this model. If so, then Aristides will be using them as a last scare tactic for Plato: seeing in them what distasteful effects his own disrespect for the classics can lead to should give him all the reason he needs to renounce it in himself. But I think things are more interestingly complicated than that. Quite apart from the fact that it is not at all clear why Cynics in particular could plausibly be supposed to have taken Plato as their model, the objects of Aristides' indignation have moments of sounding at least as much like school-based, theorizing philosophers as they do like Cynics (in § 672 they are spoken of as "ducking into their lairs" and "practicing their wonderful cleverness" there, "prating at shadows" and

“making rope out of sand”). So it is from the wrong sort of philosopher more generally, rather than just from Cynics that Plato is being encouraged to distance himself. On top of this, Aristides slides in a discussion of the meanings of the words “sophist” and “philosopher,” in the course of which he intimates that Plato himself uses the latter term two senses (ch. 680): sometimes he keeps it only for people who believe in the Forms, and the inferiority of physical entities; but at other times, he uses it as everyone else does, to apply much more generally to lovers of learning and goodness. There is at least the hint of a suggestion here that, if Plato is really to put himself in the clear, he needs to drop not only the corrosive contempt that threatens to align him with Cynics, but also the weirder, more implausible features of his own philosophy.

If that is right, then in this final sweep of his suite of *Platonic Orations*, Aristides is raising questions about Plato not just in his outward relationship with the rest of Greek culture, but also in the scope of his own philosophy, and thus also questioning the relationship of philosophy to the rest of Greek culture. And in challenging Plato personally to put himself in the clear, he is of course raising an issue for readers of the *Orations* as well: how are they (how are we) to “place” this extraordinary, non-Hellenic Hellene? It is meant to be an awkward question for Plato—whichever way he goes, he is going to have to sacrifice something of himself; and if it is an awkward question for Plato, then it points up an awkwardness for his readers too.

#### <a>ARISTIDES, PLATO AND PHILOSOPHY: THE FINAL ACCOUNT<a>

In sum, then, although the recent critical consensus that sees in the *Platonic Orations* essentially a work of conciliation and integration between oratory and philosophy is not wholly wrong, it does require very substantial adjustment. If these texts hold out the offer of a reconciliation, it is one to be concluded entirely on Aristides’ and oratory’s terms, which require in fine that both Plato and philosophy abandon any claim to a transcendent critical

vantage-point outside of conventional, mainstream culture and values. Aristides demands concessions from Plato, but offers none on his own account. He invites philosophy to accept a position in the scheme of things categorically subordinate to oratory, and Plato to acknowledge his errors and misjudgments, which Aristides has been better able to identify than he was, and return meekly to the fold of the acknowledged classics. He controls Plato both by cataloguing his failures and flaws, in character, judgement and literary technique, and by weaving his philosophical words into a total structure that is not philosophy but oratory. And he repeatedly shifts the blame for his own aggression onto Plato's own procedures, in the *Gorgias* and in other dialogues—it was Plato who started it, and everything that Aristides does is only playing him back in his own coin.<sup>56</sup> The masterly portrayer of the Socratic elenchus himself falls victim to a superior cross-examination, but can redeem himself by dropping the silly nonsense that (according to Aristides, at any rate) not even he really believes in.

All of this makes good sense in terms of Aristides' personal project, as we know it both from the *Platonic Orations* and from his other works—above all the *Sacred Tales* and *Orr.* 33 and 34<sup>57</sup>—of establishing himself, through his status as the master orator of his day, as a standard-bearer of the great Hellenic tradition more generally. In this connection it is particularly noteworthy how, as the pressure on Plato increases through *Or.* 3, so echoes of Demosthenes, and direct appeals to his personal example, grow more noticeable.<sup>58</sup> But this is in turn just one strand in a more pervasive strategy in the *Platonic Orations*, in which by quotation and appeal to example Aristides regularly lines himself up with not only the great political and military achievers of honored tradition (above all, of course, the Four, but also his own namesake Aristides the Just), but also their chroniclers, Thucydides and Plato's fellow, but better minded Socratics, Xenophon and Aeschines.<sup>59</sup> And this feature of the *Platonics* is matched in the other great work to which they are juxtaposed in the manuscript

tradition, the *Panathenaic Oration*, in which Aristides as the most comprehensive encomiast of the glories of Athens aligns himself both with the Athenian heroes of old and with the great Attic writers.<sup>60</sup> Taming Plato and enabling him to take a safe and unthreatening place inside the same cultural fold at one stroke removes a potentially awkward critic and enhances the aura of the pantheon which Aristides himself aspires to join.<sup>61</sup>

But what of philosophy? I have argued elsewhere that philosophy as an institution in the Hellenistic and (especially) the Roman imperial periods occupies a finely-balanced and thus potentially precarious position.<sup>62</sup> On their side, philosophers lay claim both to centrality (as holders of a unique key to a fulfilled human existence, and indeed a fully human existence) and to a transcendent, external vantage-point from which everything in the normal world can be seen in its true value. For them, even as they claim to lay bare the essence of the world and of true human values, any and every element in ordinary, conventional existence, up to and including the most time-honored and cherished, is in principle liable to philosophical scrutiny and dismissal. Their surrounding society (“laypeople,” *idiôtai*, in philosophers’ terms) responds by seeing them both as leading lights of civilization—not only masters of knowledge and insight in the modern world, but also jewels in the glorious past record of Hellenic culture—and as bizarre and eccentric outsiders, whose contrarian views on the values and pieties of the normal world can and should be resisted and deflected. The resulting tension manifested itself on a number of levels. The best recognized is that of elite education, with the tussle, long ago diagnosed and described by von Arnim in his contextualization of Dio Chrysostom, between oratorical and rhetorical study for top position in the curriculum.<sup>63</sup> But education—as the very word *paideia* reminds us—is not a sealed compartment: its tensions and conflicts reflect and create those in society more widely. In this context Aristides’ *Platonic Orations* have a unique interest precisely for the way that—as no other surviving ancient text does—they engage with philosophy and its perceived

awkwardness on both the narrower and the broader front, on behalf both (more narrowly) of the practice and study of oratory and (more broadly) of the values and pieties of Hellenic culture.

To describe what is going on in the *Platonic Orations* as essentially an exercise in reconciliation thus seems seriously to undervalue their interest and importance in a number of ways. In particular, it risks undervaluing the acuteness and resourcefulness of Aristides' choice of target. In setting himself to respond to the Plato of the *Gorgias*, he opened up the possibility of doing much more than simply producing yet one more defense of oratory against Plato's criticism, following tamely in the footsteps of Cicero and Quintilian, for he saw, as they had not, the possibility of using the *Gorgias* to take up the broader cultural as well as the narrower technical or educational issue. The resulting work had multiple advantages, both intellectually and personally for Aristides. Intellectually, the range of his argument made it a truer response to the *Gorgias* precisely because it acknowledged that the stakes of Plato's attack went beyond the status of oratory and rhetoric to larger questions of value. In terms of his own personal aspirations, responding to the text in which Plato most clearly challenged both oratory and conventional culture gives him too the opportunity to put himself forward as a champion on both fronts: as vindicator not only of the value of oratory, but also of Hellenic *paideia* more generally. Aristides in the *Platonic Orations* throughout plays to win, on all their levels of engagement, and the conflicts from which he aims to emerge victorious are real ones.

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<sup>1</sup> For the dating, see Dodds 1959:18–30, esp. 24–25.

<sup>2</sup> Dating any of these works is tricky. Relative to each other, *Or.* 3 must come after *Or.* 2, and *Or.* 4 in between the other two, but absolute dates are harder to be sure of. Between 145 and 147 <sc>c.e.</sc> (the period of Aristides’ residence in the Pergamum Asclepieum, the so-called *kathedra*) is plausible on the strength of *Or.* 2.66–73 and 430–36, but by no means obligatory; the other two orations offer even less by way of dating evidence. Cf. (with caution) Behr 1968a: 54–56 with n52 and 94–95 with n2 (arguing for 161–65 <sc>c.e.</sc> for *Or.* 3); 1986: 449 and 460.

<sup>3</sup> Tentatively identified by Behr 1968a: 59n60 as Sextus Julius Capito, son of Menophantes, known from *Inscr. von Pergamon* 8.2.428 and *IGRR* 4.386.

<sup>4</sup> Collected edition: Trapp 2016: 7–11. Scholia: W. Dindorf, *Aristides* vol. 3 (Leipzig: Reimer, 1829), 356–734. Sopater’s prolegomena: Dindorf 3.433–39, 744–57; Lenz 1959. For studies of aspects of the early reception of Aristides, see Harris and Holmes 2008: 253–93 (the chapters by Jones, Cribiore and Quattrocelli) and Miletto 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Behr 1968b: 186–99; Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant 1998.

<sup>6</sup> They are items 41–43 in the Giuntine and 45–47 in translations and editions from Canter (1566) to Dindorf. For 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> c. dismissals, see Baumgart 1874: 20–21; Boulanger 1923: 210–70 and 441–44; Geffcken 1928: 105–7. Although he devotes the majority of his chapter on Aristides’ view of oratory to the *Platonics*, Boulanger is bitingly dismissive of both their content and their form. Something of the dismissive tone persists in Francophone scholarship in Reardon 1971: 120–54. Cf. also Dittadi 2008: 114–15.

<sup>7</sup> So, in one version or another, Pernot 1993, Michel 1993, Kasulke 2005, Dittadi 2008 and 2012, Miletto 2017; Milazzo 2002 allows for an inner struggle on Aristides’ part, between his “two souls, the one of polemic and proud confrontation, and the other more inclined to compromise and conciliation” (153), but still on balance privileges the latter (24–30, 225–27, 283, etc.). The only study to diagnose a more aggressive approach on Aristides’ part, Flintermann 2000-1, does so in connection with only one strand in his argument (the attack on Plato’s factual accuracy); but note also a comment by Holford-Strevens 2007: 422, reviewing Kasulke: “there is malice in ‘father and teacher of orators’ (§465, cf. Cic. *De or.* 1,47) and ... in or. 4 his claws are far sharper than the feeble Capito’s”.

<sup>8</sup> Trapp 2017a: 326–31.

<sup>9</sup> Trapp 2007: 245–56; cf. also Trapp 2017b: 36–51.

<sup>10</sup> Hunter 2012, in which the *Platonic Orations* feature only very briefly and tangentially, on pp. 181–83; Fowler 2018: 232–36.

<sup>11</sup> *Or.* 2.465.

<sup>12</sup> *Or.* 4.1.

<sup>13</sup> *Or.* 3.42; 461, 557, 663; 607; cf. Flintermann 2000–1: 37–38.

<sup>14</sup> *Sacred Tales* 50.14, 50.19; 50.55–57; 51.61–63.

<sup>15</sup> On standards in ancient philosophical argumentation, see Laks 2016 and Bonazzi 2016.

<sup>16</sup> *Pace* Pernot 1993: 317, “sa méthode sera rhétorique, et plus précisément judiciaire”; and Fowler 2018:234. “Political” or “administrative” is closer than “judicial.” In this connection it is interesting to note how the Aristides *Prolegomena* deal with what they constitute as the knotty problem of how to characterise *Or.* 3 generically—precisely *not* as judicial, in their view ( $\Sigma$  3.434.30–435.3, 437.2–12 Dindorf; Lenz 1959: 160.6–161.2, 171.13–20).

<sup>17</sup> *Or.* 2.21, 52; Dittadi 2008: 117–18, 122.

<sup>18</sup> As for instance in *Or.* 3.221 and 275–77.

<sup>19</sup> *Or.* 2.344–45 and 346–61; resumed and supplemented with further material from other dialogues, *Or.* 3.511–76.

<sup>20</sup> *Or.* 3.103–5; cf. e.g. 3.57–59 (discrepancy in the verdicts passed on Pericles’ oratorical ability in *Gorgias* and *Menexenus*), 3.513–31 (Plato both damning the Four as flatterers in the *Gorgias* and declaring that they didn’t practice the arts of flattery).

<sup>21</sup> Esp. *Grg.* 482b2–6, where Socrates underlines the manifest falsehood of Callicles’ beliefs by asserting that not even he will be in agreement with himself.

<sup>22</sup> Karadimas 1996: 163, cited by Flintermann 2000–1: 52n105; Aristides himself only directly alludes to the Socratic insistence near the end of *Or.* 3 (643).

<sup>23</sup> For a summary of Cicero’s and Quintilian’s engagements with Plato and the *Gorgias*, see Vickers 1989: 163–70.

<sup>24</sup> The myth of *Protagoras* (320c–22d) is rewritten in *Or.* 2.394–99, and the treatment of the sophists in its opening scene (314e–16a) is analysed in *Or.* 3.602–4.

<sup>25</sup> Dittadi 2008: 118 rightly speaks of Plato’s text in the *Platonic Orations* as an “oggetto di studio e di interpretazione” and the *Orations* themselves as therefore a “documento nella storia dell’esegesi del testo di Platone.” Compare also Fowler 2018: 236, making the interesting point that Aristides’ attempt, by close examination of individual passages, to divide Plato against himself, goes in exactly the opposite direction to that of his Middle Platonic exegetes, who seek at all costs to unify and reconcile his diverging strands.

<sup>26</sup> He returns to Plato’s typology of *technai* and forms of “flattery” in 2.234–36 and 3.588–604.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. again Behr 1968b and Jackson et al. 1998, as in n5 above; also Dodds 1959: 58–60.

<sup>28</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia* 1033a–58d, 1086c–1107c, 1107d–27e; on Plutarch’s polemical style and strategies, see Dillon (forthcoming).

<sup>29</sup> *Menex.* 245e; cf. *Athen. Deipn.* 5.217c.

<sup>30</sup> *Symp.* 185c; *Phdr.* 274c.

<sup>31</sup> Especially Flintermann 2000–1; Flintermann however makes the attack on Plato’s fictionalizing central to Aristides’ strategy, rather than a subordinate part of a larger plan.

<sup>32</sup> *Ep. II* 314c; Aristides’ text at this point needs more attention than Behr, following Reiske, gives it. As my translations suggests, we need also, besides the supplement <ὁ δὲ οὐ γράψας>, a colon or full stop after γεγονότος and a question mark after γέγραφεν.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Milazzo 2002: 500.

<sup>34</sup> The closest parallel I can think of for this kind of display of technical philosophy-speak comes in the tenth *Oration* of Maximus of Tyre (10.5); in the *Platonic Orations*, cf. e.g., 3.172 and 204 (with a more overtly parodic tone).

<sup>35</sup> *Orr.* 3.302, 390 (ὁ θαυμάσιε); 3.135, cf. 3.266, 2.372 (ὁ ... κεφαλὴ); 2.275, 3.402, 3.644 (ὁ τᾶν).

<sup>36</sup> Milazzo 2002: 47, 119, 136, 200–2, 270, 287, 334, 509; Dittadi 2008.

<sup>37</sup> *Refutatio sententiae*: Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.21.13, 1395a18–b1, with Davies (1991: 55–56) on *Soph. Trach* 1–5. *Paraphrasis*: Theon, *Progymn.* 62–64 Spengel; Quint. *Inst.* 1.9.2 and 10.5.4–8.

<sup>38</sup> Nightingale 1995: 60–92 (tragedy), 93–132 (encomiastic genres), 133–71 (miscellaneous forms linked by claims to “authenticity,” 172–92 (comedy), 193–95 (summary, nb 95: “[Plato] deliberately violates the boundaries he has drawn”).

<sup>39</sup> *Orr.* 2.450 and 3.509, as on p. [23] below.

<sup>40</sup> *Or.* 3.632: “I think the whole business is in fact a joke: because who does not know that Socrates and Callicles and Gorgias and Polus are all Plato, turning the argument whichever way he pleases?”

<sup>41</sup> Aristides’ use of this episode is also the main issue in *Or.* 4.

<sup>42</sup> Pernot 1993: 324–25.

<sup>43</sup> *Or.* 4.28–50.

<sup>44</sup> See again Vickers 1989: 163–70, as in n23 above.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Flintermann 2000–1: 46–49.

<sup>46</sup> Most recently and extensively Milazzo 2016: 83–96, written apparently in ignorance of Hunter 2012: 181–84, and Geffcken 1929: esp. 105–7. Like Aristides, Dionysius protests his underlying respect and admiration for Plato, stigmatises him for his mean-spirited criticism and *philotimia*, and uses his attacks on his predecessors as justification for his own on him: *Ep. Pomp.* 756–57, 764.

<sup>47</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5.217c–218e.



<sup>48</sup> *Deipn.* 5.215f. On Herodicus, see Düring 1941, and on the context in Athenaeus, Trapp 2000.

<sup>49</sup> An aspect utterly missed by Kasulke 2005: 148–50, and not given much weight by any recent study.

<sup>50</sup> In both these passages Aristides is implicitly rejecting and rewriting Plato's schema in the *Gorgias*, in which oratory is damned as “the shadow image of a part of politics” (463d).

<sup>51</sup> *Prt.* 320c–323a.

<sup>52</sup> Aristides is here paying Plato back in kind for his use of the helmsman comparison to insist that being able to save lives is no great thing for orators to boast of, in *Grg.* 511c–12b.

<sup>53</sup> E.g., Lucian *Piscator* 29–37; *Hermot.* 11, 80–83; *Symp. passim*.

<sup>54</sup> Quint. *Inst.* 1 *Praef.* 9–17, 2.15.5–31; cf. Vickers 1989: 167–70.

<sup>55</sup> Bernays 1879: 100–4; Behr 1968a: 94 n. 2; 1986: 449; cf. Boulanger 1923: 249–65, esp. 259–65.

<sup>56</sup> E.g., *Orr.* 2.11–20; 3.499–510, 627–31; 4.48–51.

<sup>57</sup> On Aristides' ventures in competitive self-projection, see Bowie 2012 (esp. 229–36), Downie 2013: 28–34, Trapp 2016: 14–16.

<sup>58</sup> *Or.* 3.76, 97, 156, 499–510, 663–64, 678, 693.

<sup>59</sup> Aristides: *Orr.* 2.357–61; 3.532–34, 551–56, 637–42; Aeschines: *Orr.* 2.61–66, 74–78; 3.348–51; Thucydides: *Or.* 3.20–25, 74–78, 511.

<sup>60</sup> On this aspect of the *Panathenaic Oration*, cf. Trapp 2017a: 7–10.

<sup>61</sup> Has indeed already joined in his carefully published dreams: *Orr.* 50.14, 50.57, 51.61–63.

<sup>62</sup> Trapp 2007: 18–23, 226–57; 2013; 2017b: 28–31, 48–57.

<sup>63</sup> von Arnim 1898: 4–114.